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The Left-Hand Side of the Spectrum

Ambassadors and Advisors in Future U.S. Strategy

By Bob Killebrew

Center for a
New American
Security

Foreword

Many people contributed to the thoughts behind this paper, and I hesitate to name any without naming all. But a partial list includes scholars like Eliot Cohen, Kate Bateman, Tom Donnelly, Chris Griffin, Mary Habeck, Erin Simpson, Bob Scales, Mike Vickers, and many, many more. LTG (USA, ret.) Dick Trefry greatly influenced this study, and others, in a chance airport meeting two years ago; at 82, General Trefry is now completing sixty-two straight years of service to the U.S. Army. My special thanks to Jim Miller, of CNAS, for suggesting this paper, and to Shawn Brimley, also of CNAS, for his help and encouragement. I also thank Vinca LaFleur and Christine Parthemore for thorough and thoughtful editing which greatly improved the final product, and Billy Sountornsorn for his leadership of the publication process.

Finally, as ever, my thanks to the men and women with whom I have served, and, on the subject of advising, to Major Hanh, of the second battalion, first brigade of the Airborne Division of the Republic of South Vietnam, who taught me the business.

Cover Image

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Evan Westgate shakes hands with the Sabari sub-governer after a meeting at the district center located in the small town of Sabari in Afghanistan, March 6, 2007. Westgate is from Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Justin Holley, Released

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About the Author

Colonel (USA, ret.) Bob Killebrew served in Special Forces, mechanized, and airborne units during his career, and taught strategy at the Army War College. Since retirement, he has consulted for a number of defense-oriented research institutions and frequently speaks and writes on strategic issues.

> *"It is fundamental to success that the Chief of Mission (COM) and the senior military field officer achieve a close and frank working relationship early in their tenure together. Failure to do so risks failure [of the mission], and should constitute a basis for replacing one or the other."*
>
> —*The Country Team in American Strategy*, U.S. Department of Defense (December 2006)[2]

INTRODUCTION

The failure of "preemptive war," the irrelevance of rapid, decisive operations, and the inability of high-tech weaponry to bring success in Iraq and Afghanistan all indicate that American planning between the 1991 Gulf War and today's Iraq War resulted in major mismatches between ends, ways, and means in the early years of the twenty-first century.[1] Clearly, the United States needs a new military strategy, but after five years of war we are only now beginning to adjust our aims for the future.

Some may disagree. Inevitably, as the United States grapples with two unpalatable insurgencies and other challenges, a possible conclusion from our recent history is that counterinsurgency is too protracted for the American public, that our security strategies should be centered on our strengths in technology, and those strengths should enable the U.S. to avoid the kinds of chest-to-chest grapple that characterizes our current operational focus. While this argument has some power when applied to traditional nation-state conflicts, it is the wrong response to the threat the United States and its allies face from a surging jihadist movement that poses an existential threat to Western civilization.

The "spectrum of conflict," a term coined by military doctrine writers in the 1970s, is useful to illustrate the range of possible conflicts that challenge U.S. security strategies. With "conventional" warfare in the bar's center, the far right of the spectrum was reserved for nuclear war. The left-hand side was labeled "insurgency," or, if one was preparing responses, "counterinsurgency." Doctrine writers in the days of Mao and Che Guevara understood that the insurgent's objective was to develop sufficient strength to succeed at the left end of the conflict spectrum, and then push rightward along the spectrum until he could succeed in conventional war and the final stage of consolidating his gains. Meanwhile, the counterinsurgent strove to keep the insurgent as far to the left as possible, and there to undermine his strength and eventually reduce him to inconsequence. In Vietnam, as in China, the insurgent prevailed; in El Salvador and thus far in Colombia, the outcome has been different.

The new conditions of warfare occasioned by the rise of radical Islam have returned U.S. attention to the left-hand side of the spectrum. Indeed, the religious aspect of the threat—the appeal to the religious faith of individuals—acts on a level even more subtle than the socio-political appeal of communism that attracted millions in the last century. The effect has been to push the left-hand side of the conflict spectrum even further to the left, into pre-insurgency or pre-terrorism.

This shift has created a new and profound challenge for the United States. Supporting states threatened by virulently anti-Western and anti-U.S. ideologies is clearly in our best interests. But intervention once a religious movement has acquired armed status inevitably means that U.S. troops risk “foreign devil” status even before they disembark from their ships and planes. Deployment of U.S. forces into local conflicts that have been already defined in religious terms puts U.S. objectives and forces at a disadvantage before operations even begin.

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[1] "Ends, Ways, and Means" is a phrase used by strategists to delineate the difference between goals that a state wants to achieve (ends), the policies followed in pursuit of those goals (ways), and the resources devoted to the policies (means). See John Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 2002), p. 5.

[2] U.S. Department of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD-SO/LIC), *The Country Team in American Strategy,* (December 2006), p. 2.

We can do better. The most effective U.S. strategy in opposition to the spread of jihadist ideology is subtle, sensitive, and well integrated U.S. support for struggling states threatened by jihadism begun in advance of crisis. This report argues that the most effective way to achieve these aims is by better integrating U.S. country teams and their military adjuncts forward, *in the host countries,* where the effects of U.S. policies are most immediately felt. Integrating American diplomacy and military advice should focus first on bottom-up reinforcement of the tip of the spear — that “spear” being the U.S. diplomatic and military presence in a threatened country — without waiting for top-down interagency reform in Washington. While interagency cooperation inside the Beltway is a laudable goal, more immediate results will come from reinforcing the efforts of the men and women serving in U.S. missions abroad who are meeting the daily challenges posed by jihadist ideology.

The concept of providing military assistance to struggling U.S. allies is not new. This paper will use the term Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG) indiscriminately to refer to all military forces in a host country charged with advising and assisting that country’s military forces, minus military attachés assigned to the embassy or visiting U.S. conventional or Special Forces training teams. At present, over 50 different forms of military assistance detachments—some called MAAGs, others Military Liaison Officers, and still others U.S. Liaison Officers, or a range of alternative designations — are serving in various countries across the globe. Quite often, the label is developed with an eye to local sensitivities; not all countries want to receive “assistance,” but they are willing to host “liaison” teams that do roughly the same thing.

Likewise, for the remainder of this report, the term “country team” or “U.S. mission” will indicate those civilian agencies — and military attachés — like the CIA, Commerce Department, FBI and so on, plus of course the core of U.S. State Department officers who reside in the U.S. embassy under the control of the U.S. ambassador. The ambassador him or herself may be referred to as either the ambassador or as the chief of mission (COM). Public law gives COMs “control” over the various forms of military units in their countries, and appropriately so. It does not, however, give them “command” — a critical military distinction, and one which this paper suggests is essential for maximizing MAAG success.

Advocating a shift in military strategy toward longer-term, forward-stationed advisory missions is not meant to suggest that conventional combat forces are unimportant. While this paper is about preventing open conflict before it occurs or, if it occurs, assisting host countries’ security forces to dampen and contain conflict without direct U.S. involvement. But not all conflicts can be so contained. The danger is that conflict, once underway, is difficult to tamp down — and if preventive efforts on the far left-hand side fail, future open warfare may well combine simultaneous conventional, irregular, and even nuclear conflict, with horrific consequences (for example, consider U.S. military operations in a collapsed North Korea or Pakistan). The failure of U.S. strategic thinking to date has been the neglect of both ends of the conflict spectrum in favor of the conventional middle. Recent events, and the potential for even more serious conflict, call for a more innovative, expanded perspective of war and U.S. capabilities to protect against it.

THE STRATEGIC SETTING

When in the spring of 1947 the Truman administration decided to support the Greek government's fight against Communist insurgency, Dean Acheson believed it was the "moment of creation" for a new American policy.[3] The Truman Doctrine not only pledged support for Greece but recast American foreign policy from centuries-old isolationism to world leadership.

This was *terra incognita* for the United States. But once the doctrine was in place, its first practical application was to dispatch a military assistance group to Greece to aid the struggling Greek government. Throughout the Cold War, military and political support to allies threatened by communist subversion remained a major pillar of U.S. strategy. Although widespread use of military assistance was sometimes controversial—the "he may be a bastard, but he's *our* bastard" problem—discriminate combinations of economic, political, and military aid employed in support of U.S. aims ultimately became a major component of U.S. containment strategy.

As the twentieth century progressed, the U.S. military services supported containment by a variety of means. The maintenance of strong strategic and conventional forces, the development of strong reserves, and a semi-mobilized industrial base all contributed to a diverse and multi-capable force structure oriented on a global threat. In addition, under both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, U.S. national security strategy developed and implemented a broad array of civilian and military capabilities designed to support allies under threat of communist subversion and to win hearts and minds in regions vulnerable to communist penetration. Some sixty military advisory efforts worldwide joined the Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Peace Corps, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other departments and agencies in projecting a robust and diverse view of America and U.S. support to countries around the globe. Of course, not all efforts were successful, but most were. U.S. support was critical in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt once the opportunity arose, in Europe, and in Asia. Later, U.S. support for noncommunist governments in Central America played a key and successful role in that region. The most notable failure, of course, was Vietnam.

Vietnam changed everything. Initially, and often against bureaucratic odds, the press of counterinsurgency operations resulted in the establishment of a number of innovative approaches to advisory and interagency requirements. To cope with the huge demand for advisors, the U.S. Army developed a number of six-week Military Assistance Training Advisory (MATA) courses focused on specific countries and assignments; established in-country schools for further brush-ups on specific advisory assignments; and wrote the first (and to this date, only) field manual for advisors and stability operations.[4] Meanwhile, the Marines developed their own three-month course. Both focused on language and cultural training, with limited success.

Outside the military services, the creation of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program in Vietnam brought together over 2,500 military and civilian advisors at the district and sub-district levels, unified under a civilian deputy to the commander of the military assistance command.[5] The CORDS program appeared to be making progress. But it was too little too late.

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[3] Walter Issacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 389.

[4] FM 31-73, *Advisor Handbook for Stability Operations.*

[5] Robert D. Ramsey III, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador,* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), pp. 30-43.

And Vietnam ultimately was a U.S. defeat. In the retrenchment after the war and the drawdown of U.S. military forces that followed the Soviet Union's collapse, military assistance groups declined in numbers and importance. Post-Vietnam legislation shifted responsibilities for foreign military sales and imposed oversight requirements on foreign aid, making interagency operations overseas more cumbersome and restricting flexibility in country teams.[6] Congressional actions that stripped State Department capabilities in the mid-1990s cut deeply into the chief of mission's ability to bring American influence to bear; USIA was disestablished and USAID rolled into the State Department, itself reeling from cutbacks. With the exception of Special Operations Forces that continued to emphasize low-intensity warfare, the military services turned away from counterinsurgency and advisory missions toward more conventional, expeditionary-style operations that emphasized technology and the readiness of conventional military forces to deploy quickly and fight short, sharp wars. As a nation, the U.S. turned away from the growing challenges of insurgency and terrorism.

After the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, counterinsurgency once again became a U.S. concern. And attention turned once more to the integration of political and military strategies. In conventional wars, political and military action can be more easily divided. But because successful counterinsurgency must focus on the security of the population, politics and military activities must be much more integrated, with politics taking the lead. As David Galula, the leading French counterrevolutionary expert, writes:

> The objective being the population itself, the operations designed to win it over…are essentially of a political nature… so intricate is the interplay between the political and the military actions that they cannot be tidily separated; on the contrary, every military move has to be weighed with regard to its political effects and vice versa.[7]

Yet, while military and governmental leaders acknowledge the importance of integrating political, economic, and military capabilities, results have not yet matched the rhetoric. Civilian and military lines of command in counterinsurgency theaters have remained separate, leaving effective coordination up to local political and military leaders. On the political side, the State Department and other agencies have had difficulty recruiting personnel willing to undergo the hardships and danger that forward service in a counterinsurgency theater entails. The military has been slow to recognize the need for sustained advisory efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has only recently begun to look at advisory efforts as more than just a short-term mission. That advisors and trainers could be central to a larger strategy has not yet been embraced, or indeed considered seriously, by the U.S. military.

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[6] One is struck by the pre-Vietnam memories of now-retired country team members about cooperation among agencies in that period. It was not unusual in Laos, for example, to hear of USAID workers flying in CIA-operated airplanes delivering foodstuffs bought with DoD funding. One veteran commented to the author, "The people today just don't understand that there was ever another way to do it." LTG (USA, ret.) Dick Trefrey communication to author.

[7] David Galula, *Revolutionary War; Theory and Practice,* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 9.

THE THREAT AND THE RESPONSE

After the events of September 11, 2001, terrorism moved to the top of America's security concerns, followed shortly thereafter by its first cousin, insurgency. Even in the aftermath of counterattacks by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan, and elsewhere, it is manifestly clear that jihadism is a grave threat, not only to the United States, but also to a number of states struggling to provide governance to their people. Jihadism shares with revolutionary communist movements a desire to subvert governments, but claims to be guided and inspired by God instead of a mere mortal like Karl Marx. It is similar to communist ideology by subverting government, but dangerously dissimilar by setting up God in place of Marx; an escalation of immense importance because it challenges all secular political authority. Indeed, one scholar of Islamic jihad has observed that jihadist theology is opposed to *any* form of political rule other than that of the Koran:

> If only God is to be worshipped and obeyed, then only His laws have any significance… The people (as envisaged in most democracies), rulers, legislatures, and even entire nations have no inherent sovereignty or right to rule—to God alone belongs this exclusive right. The only role left for a nation's "leaders" is to implement God's laws, not to modify in any way the least of his commands.[8]

Much has been written on al Qaeda and its splinter groups, but one point bears emphasizing here: As the war on terror, or the "Long War," continues, and as the United States and our allies place ever greater pressure across the globe on al Qaeda and affiliated movements, jihadism is likely to continue to fragment into nationalist, theocratic, or regional groups—in addition to local self-starters—that offer some chance of defeat in detail by opposing forces on the ground. The strategy that ultimately defeats jihadism will require both short- and long-term objectives. In the short-term we will deny jihadists sanctuary, confront armed groups before they rise to the level of insurgencies, and deny them access to and credibility with the populations they need from which to recruit. In the longer term, the slow and patient containment of extreme Islamic creeds should ultimately transform theocratic Islamic extremism to less virulent forms, opening the way for jihadists to be isolated, converted, or otherwise neutralized.[9]

Key to understanding the role of U.S. missions and their associated military advisors is the indirect role U.S. strategy should play in confronting radical Islam and jihadism. Rather than taking on directly Islamic or jihadi influences in someone else's back yard, U.S. policy with regard to the "far left" of the spectrum of conflict should indirectly support local governments' resistance to jihadist influences. The U.S. hand must be sufficiently subtle so as not to embarrass a host nation's leaders or expose them to charges of selling out to the West. It means as well that U.S. aid must be modulated carefully so as to remain within the boundaries set by U.S. policy and the chief of mission. In many if not most cases, the bulk of U.S. aid should be nonmilitary economic or humanitarian aid, delivered by the country team and its agencies.

U.S. military aid must likewise be apportioned with careful regard to the needs of the host government and its peoples. Should the level of violent Islamic-based incidents increase, then military aid may be stepped up proportionately, but always under the rubric of assisting the host country in its struggle against extremism or jihadist penetration.

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[8] Dr. Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror,* (Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 60-61.

[9] For a discussion of how Islamic extremists may eventually be contained and their behavior moderated, see Noah Feldman, *After Jihad,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). In this context, though, "jihadis" refer to the bitter inner core of the radical Islamic movement who are probably beyond moderation.

Once established and enjoying reasonably good relations with the host country's security services, the MAAG becomes a base for U.S. military aid, both in the form of materiel and in advising and training the host nation's forces as required. Additionally, and as part of the regional combatant commander's regional engagement strategy, MAAGs may be linked together regionally, and support not only U.S. country teams directly, but also the interests of the regional combatant commander and, through the U.S. chiefs of mission, the appropriate regional authorities at the State Department.

Broadly speaking, an indirect U.S. strategy would seek to support the host country with better governance, a more robust economy, improved public services, and especially security services, plus whatever else the United States can do behind the scenes to encourage healthy political environments that can resist penetration by radical Islamic splinter groups, and violent jihadists. More specifically, the host country, with help from the United States and possibly the cooperation of other regional states, would seek to deny jihadists land, time, and access to the people. As that is done, time and attrition would settle the more violent jihadists while more moderate Islamic leaders prevail over the undecided bulk of the population.

STATE AND DEFENSE

Although this paper concerns MAAGs and their potential uses, any discussion must include the country team of the U.S. mission, headed by the U.S. ambassador as chief of mission. The term "country team" applies to the political, economic, and intelligence agencies that generally operate from U.S. embassies or consulates. Members of the agencies represented in the mission report through separate channels to their various headquarters and receive funding and direction through the same channels. Depending on the country and the circumstances, all have historically operated under the loose coordination of the ambassador, who retains responsibility for U.S. activities in the host country. Thus the U.S. military attachés assigned to the embassy are assigned to other military headquarters and report through channels other than those of the State Department; the same applies to country team members from agencies like Commerce, Treasury, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Central Intelligence Agency. U.S. missions generally have a security assistance officer (SAO) whose job is to oversee the use of U.S. security assistance, and who reports through separate defense channels.

U.S. military officers often mistake the U.S. mission for a functioning administrative unit. In fact, and depending on the character of the ambassador, missions are generally not "organizations" per se; they operate in a much looser and decentralized manner. The tension between striped-pants diplomats and knuckle-dragging soldiers goes back at least as far as the Romans, and it is likely to continue. But in recent American history there are many instances of country teams teaming with military counterparts to aggressively pursue U.S. goals.

A recent case study of embassies that displayed a disposition for action observed:

> Certainly a COM [chief of mission] and his team must represent the United States, as tradition and Presidential directives require. But the evidence indicates that for COMs and country teams involved in pre- or counterinsurgency activities, a disposition for field operations and for initiative also appears to be imperative. In both case studies, operational imperatives pulled country team members together and caused them to find innovative ways to share information and resources. In each case, the country teams organized some form of resource-sharing mechanism so that assets could be utilized for the common good. Clearly, the personality of the COM was key; in the Laos case, the team there benefited from a string of ambassadors who were action-oriented and who, with one exception, worked well with military officers to spur on action. In the Afghan case study, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and LTG David Barno each focused on operations as well.[10]

But the relationship isn't always so smooth. Despite generations of officers reciting Clausewitz's mantra that war is simply politics by another means, military leaders in general and the U.S. Defense Department in particular generally have sought to operate independently of political statesmen whenever possible. But attitudes are changing. The just-issued U.S. Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency field manual states that "While in the initial stages of COIN, military actions appear especially predominant, political objectives must retain primacy."[11]

Clearly, the press of finding effective pre-insurgency or counterinsurgency strategies is reasserting that political considerations must trump military plans—a fundamental principle with which every insurgent leader from Washington through Mao to bin Laden would agree.

The second point concerns the relationship between the political side, in this case the COM, and the military commander in-country who supports the political objective. In military doctrine, "unity of command," one of the basic principles of war, gives a single person directive authority to accomplish a task. "Unity of effort," a relatively new term, calls for coordination and cooperation among agencies or forces toward a common goal; it is in vogue today as a halfway measure in cases where unity of command is not possible—as in the case of allied armies or nongovernmental agencies not subject to U.S. government direction. It is currently applied to relations between the U.S. State Department and U.S. military commanders, as if unity of command, and true integration of political and military functions, is as implausible as if State and Defense were separate countries.

This has not always been the case. President John F. Kennedy nicely caught the point in a 1961 letter to U.S. ambassadors, when he said:

> Now one word about your relations with the military. As you know, the United States Diplomatic Mission includes Service Attaches, *Military Assistance Advisory Groups,* and other Military components attached to the mission. It does not, however, include military forces operating under the command of a United States area military commander…[12]

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[10] U.S. Department of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD-SO/LIC), *The Country Team in American Strategy,* (December 2006), p. 2.

[11] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency,* FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 15 December 2006), p. 26

[12] "The Kennedy Letter," Department of State Bulletin Dec. 11, 1961, pp. 993-994. Emphasis added. See also the "Independent Task Force Report: State Department Reform," (Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2001).

Clearly, at one time MAAGs were intended to fall under the purview of the COM, and were full members of the country team—in Kennedy's terms, of the U.S. Diplomatic Mission. Subsequent events have distanced the MAAGs from the country team and into a closer relationship with the regional combatant commander. While too much can be made of this—given good will, ambassadors, regional commanders and MAAG commanders can work toward the "coordination and cooperation" that unity of effort requires—this has all too often been a blind spot in effective integration of military support toward achieving a political objective.[13]

Evidence is accumulating that jury-rigged "unity of effort" schemes are suboptimizing American efforts at the very time we need maximum results.[14] If U.S. strategy is to aim for discrete, subtle support of struggling nations threatened by radical Islam and jihadi aggression, and if military advisors and assistance groups are to play the most effective roles, then lines of authority forward in U.S. missions—where the rubber meets the road—must be cleaned up. MAAGs should be integrated into the country team and should be under the command of the ambassador.[15]

A shift in the ambassador's authority relative to the MAAG is not as difficult as it sounds. Most ambassadors and military commanders work well together. The difference is more subtle. It returns the MAAG to full membership in the country team and makes much easier the integration of military activities into the ambassador's overall plan for the country.

The regional combatant commander must remain in the MAAG's loop, because the MAAG relies on the combatant commander for real support—logistics, administrative actions, and a myriad of other details. Further, if the situation inside a given country deteriorates and the United States decides to deploy additional troops as advisors or more, then the MAAG could well become a basis for expanding the U.S. effort; for example, if U.S. forces deploy to a critical point, the president may direct that a military representative take command of combatant forces from the ambassador, who remains in a supporting role.[16] In a theater under threat of jihadi insurrection, the ambassador and the regional combatant commander may shift supporting or supported roles relative to the MAAG depending on the scale and intensity of the insurgency threat in each country.

The bottom line is that unity of command is vital during the planning and execution of political and military operations in a pre-insurgency theater. Unity is best achieved by subordinating the MAAG to the COM, with the regional combatant commander in a supporting role.

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[13] For a failure to integrate military and political objectives, look no further than the Bremer-Sanchez relationship during the critical early stages of the war in Iraq. Other stories of rough civil-military relations abound, though there are successes too. The question is whether U.S. strategy should depend on the lucky coincidence of compatible personalities, not only between the chiefs, but between subordinates as well.

[14] See, for example, Henry Nuzum, *Echoes of CORDS in the Kush; Interagency Approaches to Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Vietnam*, House Armed Services Committee, (15 December 2006).

[15] Resistance to this change may well come from State rather than the Defense Department. In the years since Vietnam, ambassadors have grown as accustomed to the separation of political and military means as has the military. "In several cases, embassy staff saw their role as limited to a review of choices already made by 'the military side of the house.'" U.S. Senate, *Embassies as Command Posts in the Anti-Terror Campaign (The Lugar Report)*, Committee on Foreign Relations, (15 December 2006), p. 10.

[16] Essentially the situation in Baghdad today.

BUILDING THE 21ST CENTURY MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND ADVISORY GROUP

As a critical element of an indirect approach to defeating global jihadism, MAAGs must meet two general criteria. First, as discussed above, MAAGs should be an integral part of the country team and be under command of the U.S. ambassador, who would then be responsible for integrating the MAAG's capabilities—that is, integrating U.S. military capabilities—into his plans to support the host country. Integrated MAAGs, however, would also continue to report and respond to the plans of the regional combatant commander, and would coordinate the military support of the ambassador's plan with the military commander. This is not as complex and difficult as it may seem; ample precedent exists for MAAG-type elements to report to several headquarters at once.[17] But multiple reporting channels are one thing, clear command lines are another; both are essential for effective country team operations.

Unity of command—not effort—should also guide U.S. planning should conditions in the host country warrant more serious intervention. As the threat of conflict escalates, the rank and status of both the ambassador and the commander of the MAAG can also be adjusted in ways appropriate to the challenge. A special ambassador with expanded powers and greater access, for example, can be appointed to the U.S. mission; a higher-ranking officer with more military authority and experience can assume command of the MAAG.[18] As the "Kennedy Letter" foresaw, threats to the host country can escalate to the point that the president may choose to deploy "fielded forces" under the command of the regional commander, in which case the role of the ambassador and the U.S. mission may be altered. The essential point is that making the MAAG commander subordinate to the U.S. ambassador at lower levels of conflict both enhances interagency operations in the host country and provides the United States with more options should conflict erupt or escalate.

Because this flexibility is fundamental to the concept of MAAGs as strategic instruments, there should be no fixed organizational plan, size, or composition of all MAAGs. Instead, conditions in the host country should dictate the mission and makeup of the group. Conceptually, the MAAG should be able to expand, as needed, from a small cohort of trainers and military sales supervisors to an expanded training and advisory effort, and then to a more serious advisory and resupply program on the scales of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq today, depending on the host country's needs.

As circumstances warrant, MAAGs should be commanded by an officer of sufficient rank to speak with authority to the host country's military leadership. The actual size of the U.S. MAAG is of little consequence to this decision; host countries take the rank of the MAAG commander as an indicator of how seriously the United States takes their country and its security situation. Additionally, the commander should be of sufficient seniority to hold his or her own in the country team and among the staff of the regional commander. Depending on circumstances, the MAAG would normally be commanded by a colonel or brigadier general (or Navy captain or rear admiral [lower half]) of any service, with provision for the slot to be filled by a more senior officer if circumstances warrant.

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[17] It is not unusual for the commander of a MAAG or associated military detachment to report to several bosses; the author once normally reported to three. But one was clearly more equal than others.

[18] In a recent wargame, a hypothetical MAAG operated under the control of the COM until a crisis escalated the threat to American interests. At that point, a Richard Holbrooke-type presidential envoy and the three-star deputy commander of the regional combatant command superseded both the ambassador and the commander of the MAAG. The country team—and the MAAG—continued to function under the ambassador, but with greatly increased authority and a slight increase in size. The next step, had the crisis escalated into open warfare, would have been to place the ambassador in support of U.S. military operations, but that was not necessary for the game's objectives.

Some advisory and training groups may consist of only a few officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Some may be much larger. All will have an appropriate administrative staff supported by the mission and by the regional commander's staff, as needed. In every case where the U.S. mission permits accompanied tours, military families should join the families of the embassy staff overseas; their presence (and longer tour lengths for the military members) is an indication to the host country of the seriousness of U.S. support.

Future MAAGs should be designed for three core functions. First, to establish beneficial relations with the host country's armed forces. Second, to train and advise those forces as decided by the host country and the U.S. chief of mission. Third, the MAAG should supervise and carry out foreign military sales and its associated training, the ultimate objective of which is to create more capable allied armed forces that are also logistically similar to our own for interoperability in crisis.

The MAAG's training and advisory role is the heart of the assistance mission, and will vary with the host country's circumstances. "Training" and "advising" are separate missions: the former generally takes place in training camps and garrisons, the latter in the field. As a rule in both cases, the American trainer or advisor's credentials are professional expertise in the task at hand—if the subject is mechanics, the advisor had better be a good mechanic—plus whatever other advantages he or she can bring to the immediate task, including recent experience in U.S. units and sufficient cultural awareness to fit into his or her role. In some cases, advising may call for a relatively junior officer to "advise" a grizzled battalion commander who has been fighting for years; in others, the task may involve basic instruction of inexperienced recruits. Regardless, sensitivity to the customs of the country and some translation capability—either through familiarity with the language or a trusted interpreter—will be necessary.

In many instances, particularly if advisors are accompanying units into combat, the advisor's value to "his" or "her" unit may be access to U.S. capabilities that would otherwise not be available to the local force. This is true whether the advisors are from line forces or from Special Operations Forces that may operate as an integral part of a MAAG or as a special attachment. Historically, advisors have added value with support from U.S. aircraft or artillery, with communications, and—very importantly—with medical evacuation. In developing plans for expanding functions if required, a key question should be the kind of additional U.S. support advisors will have on call when they accompany local units into the field.

Of course, any decision to allow advisors to accompany host nation troops into combat would not be made by the ambassador or even by the regional combatant commander, but at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Such a decision would prompt other choices regarding the extent of U.S. involvement and the levels of resourcing appropriate to the mission. In making these decisions, the U.S. administration and military leadership will benefit from intelligence and recommendations from a combined and well-integrated U.S. country team.[19]

Foreign military sales, or foreign military aid generally, is a powerful U.S. tool. Often, foreign militaries find it easier to support U.S. policies because the payoff is access to U.S. weapons and materiel, and the technical skills that accompany the weapons. As a result of legislative changes in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the Department of State now administers direct foreign military aid, while the Defense Department manages foreign military sales and a mix of powerful assistance and training programs around the globe. Additionally, overseas combatant commands with region-sized areas of operation exert strong military and political influence, often eclipsing staff-poor U.S. missions with more restricted focus, lower profiles, and much lower budgets. An agreed-on legislative program sponsored by both State and Defense to streamline lines of budgeting authority over aid to foreign militaries, and to make those programs more responsive to countries receiving U.S. military aid, would be a useful step forward and would likely have the support of key military leaders.[20] Even a cursory review of combined country team and military operations in past decades shows great amounts of time and resources wasted in bureaucratic wrangling over resourcing and funding lines. One former military officer involved in Afghan operations commented that at times the United States' own bureaucracy was more of an obstacle than the enemy.[21] Neither department is wholly at fault for the convoluted manner in which foreign military aid—or foreign aid, period—is administered. Legislative action is required to cut the knot.

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[19] This is, of course, the Vietnam scenario. But a closer reading of history indicates that the political and military lines of authority were not unified in the critical early stages of 1963-64, and other political factors unique to that time were in play. The alternative—not to integrate political and military functions in country teams and rely on deployment of U.S. forces when the situation in the host country is really bad—is much worse.

An effective and often overlooked tool for expanding U.S. influence is the practice of bringing foreign officers to the United States to attend U.S. military schools. While the United States maintains exchange programs with some allies with established military schools, such as the British Army, the capability to bring aspiring military leaders from struggling countries to the U.S., without exchange, often builds affection and respect for America among officers who frequently rise to the top of their own militaries.

Prior to the Vietnam War, the military services administered foreign schooling programs and enjoyed some flexibility in selecting who attended; often the MAAG chief could act with speed. At present, foreign schooling is administered by the Department of State and is subject to the same budget review as other foreign military assistance programs. As part of the legislative review suggested below, selection of foreign military officers to attend U.S. schools should return to military hands—ideally, the commander of the frontline MAAG—and should be expedited as an important part of the training and advising role.[22]

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[20] "FMS [foreign military sales] is particularly useful in helping our partners build modern, capable forces that can more easily integrate into Coalition operations. However, long administrative delays and procurement lead times undermine responsiveness to emerging threats. Expanded . . . funding is helping to address this problem by allowing the Department of Defense to directly fund security cooperation activities. However, expanded . . . funding in dollar amounts and including partner internal security forces that are engaged in fighting terror would be helpful." Statement by Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander, U.S. Central Command, to the House Armed Services Committee, (18 April 2007).

[21] COL (USA, ret.) David Lamm conversation with the author, (19 April 2007).

[22] This recommendation arose initially from a conversation with LTG (USA, ret.) Dick Trefry on his experience in Laos from 1972 to 1973.

FORCE STRUCTURE IMPLICATIONS

A U.S. strategy to indirectly counter global jihadism still will require hefty conventional forces to deter more conventional forms of aggression and to provide backup to forward-stationed U.S. missions. Further, there is no "return to normal" in the cards for U.S. ground forces, on which the weight of an energized MAAG program would most immediately fall. Even if increases in the U.S. Army eventually cap the active duty force at around 547,000 and the Marines at 202,000, as called for by current administration proposals, the continuing turmoil caused by deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the pull of other commitments, rebuilding, and training demands will absorb the strength of the conventional forces for the next decade. Force structuring to deploy an enhanced MAAG capability will have to take place in conjunction with, but not in opposition to, the rebuilding of America's ground forces.[23]

Enhancing military training and advisory capabilities overseas is not solely a Defense Department concern. A shift in security strategy of the magnitude discussed here, one that rebuilds military training and advisory capacity forward in threatened areas, must be developed in conjunction with the whole government, and will require the support of the U.S. Congress. Post-Vietnam "reforms" and thirty years of piecemeal legislation have produced a tangle of laws and regulations that, while supporting very specific oversight functions, generally inhibit the ability of U.S. missions and military advisory groups to work effectively together and even, in some cases, internally. These laws, generally useful and necessary when considered singly, should be consolidated and streamlined to enable U.S. missions and MAAGs to more effectively combine advisory, training, and military sales functions in host countries.

Additionally, the State Department will have to make considerable changes in its current structure and methods of operation. Today's country teams today are not staffed or trained to operate in an integrated manner, nor, at current levels of manning, can the foreign service establish and maintain a well-trained officer corps. The Departments of State and Defense should jointly propose legislation to the Congress to make more effective the operations of U.S. missions and MAAGs overseas, including end strength increases for the foreign service.[24]

Because the essential materiel of an overseas training and advisory capability is well-trained mid- and senior grade officers and NCOs, the most immediate impact on force structure of an expanded MAAG strategy is that the officer and NCO corps of the Army and Marine Corps, and to a lesser extent, the Navy and Air Force, should be expanded as necessary. Estimating the number required by a shift in strategy has proven extraordinarily complex, as data often fail to differentiate between military personnel stationed overseas in the fifty-plus detachments that oversee foreign military sales, training, military liaison, and other functions, plus those assigned on temporary duty, present for training exercises, or so on. A rough guess is that an enhanced MAAG capability would initially require about 1,000 additional mid- to senior field grade officers, and about double that number of senior NCOs (Sergeant First Class/ Gunnery Sergeant and above).

The core of any training and advisory effort is competence in military skills. Given the size and complexity of changes now underway in the land forces, and the direct advantage of filling the ranks of combat units with officers and NCOs with overseas area expertise, most officers and NCOs assigned to training and advisory duties should be taken from the operating forces, sent to special schools, assigned to MAAGs for two to three years (depending on the theater), and then returned to mainstream assignments. The advantage of rotating mainstream officers and NCOs through advisory tours and infusing area expertise in the ranks, the difficulty of forecasting demand in one theater or another, as well as the difficulty of maintaining proficiency in basic skills, argues against establishing a special occupational specialty as an "advisor" or trainer.

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[23] See Michèle A. Flournoy and Tammy S. Schultz, "Shaping U.S. Ground Forces for the Future: Getting Expansion Right," (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2007).

[24] There are a number of recent studies and proposals extant to support these views; what has been lacking is specific action based on a change in strategy. The Defense Department's *Country Team in American Strategy,* previously cited, is a good start; see also U.S. Senate, *Embassies as Command Posts in the Anti-Terror Campaign (The Lugar Report),* Committee on Foreign Relations, (15 December 2006).

A certain number of senior personnel, however, should have the option to specialize in foreign assignments and return to specific countries for extended tours. In fact, in the latter stages of the Vietnam War the U.S. Army attempted to establish a Military Assistance Officer Program (MAOP) career field for mid-grade and senior officers; the program developed a hierarchy of service schools similar to the existing line, staff and senior schools extant in the branches, with the addition of language training and other skills. The intent was for participants to rotate between branch and MAOP assignments.[25] Like many other initiatives that would have relevance today, the MAOP program died in the retrenchment after Vietnam.[26]

Building on previous experience, the U.S. Army, as executive agent for the Department of Defense, should reconsider a program like MAOP for those officers who would specialize in foreign assistance and advisory efforts. The Army should also reconsider courses similar to, but better than, the Vietnam-era Military Assistance Training Advisory course, the function of which was to put a finishing-school spin on already-branch-qualified officers en route to advisory missions in Vietnam. Though only a 6-week course, it "…was intended to introduce advisors to the essential things they needed to be familiar with for advisory duty. Quickly, the focus of the MATA course became a familiarization with the Vietnamese culture and language and a general knowledge of advisor duties… not technical or MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) skills."[27]

Of course any future MATA-like course must include language training, but focusing on the diversity of languages required to support a global strategy will be a challenge. Judging from even Special Forces' difficulty in teaching language skills to their elite troops, language proficiency is always going to be a special problem for U.S. military personnel until they get in-country, where language proficiency really increases.

If the United States pursues a national security strategy emphasizing the indirect approach of aiding threatened nations, and the appropriate legislation and regulatory changes can be instituted, a two-tiered joint program—including both a senior course and a junior course, and likely run by the Army for all the services—would be essential to providing the cadre required to implement the strategy. Attendance at the senior course, which should be open to State Department foreign service officers and selected participants from other agencies as well, would prepare senior officers specializing in foreign military assistance roles for selection to command MAAGs and other assignments on regional command staffs. A junior course, probably longer than six weeks, would provide advisory skills and cultural and language training for more junior officers and NCOs on their way to assignments overseas. The flow of students would vary according to demands from the field.

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[25] In words that sound very familiar today, the MAOP program was to "… develop the integrated and coordinated skills required for successful stability operations, to bring together military functions related to advising host nation military forces and to focus on operational issues…" See Robert D. Ramsey, III, *Advising Indigenous Forces; American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador,* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), p. 63. This excellent history should be required reading for those interested in advisory efforts and stability operations.

[26] Either long-term or only for the period of their assignment as advisors, officers and NCOs might be assigned to a higher-level unit, such as the Army Advisor Corps proposed by Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl. See John A. Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps," (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2007).

[27] Robert D. Ramsey, III, "Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador," (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), p.41.

CONCLUSION

The development and maintenance of an advisory capacity in the armed services is not strictly a decision for the armed services themselves. The legislative and interagency environment within the United States government has to be supportive, and in many ways that environment is not, today, prepared for a sustained increase in military advisors and trainers worldwide. This is not to say such an increase is not needed, but the action must be government-wide, not only on the part of the services and the Defense Department.

The United States needs a national security strategy that sees as fundamental an improved capability to train and support the militaries of countries struggling against al Qaeda and other radical terrorist groups. Implementation cannot wait if the enhanced MAAG and country team concept described above are to make the timely contribution they must in the long war against jihadist terrorism.

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